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SUBJECT: PARAMARIBO 2009 OSAC CRIME SAFETY REPORT

REF: 08 STATE 132056

#### OVERALL CRIME AND SAFETY

Reported crimes in Suriname declined slightly in 2008, however violent crimes increased significantly. Foreigners in general are viewed as targets of opportunity. In addition, poor neighborhoods and squatters are increasingly infringing on the residential neighborhoods housing the expatriate communities. This enables criminal elements to reside in close proximity to their most frequent targets. Those who can afford it rely on guard services for 24-hour protection of their residences and places of business. These local guards, as well as commonly added physical security elements (lighting, perimeter fences, and grilles), have been instrumental in deterring criminals.

Traffic accidents are a major concern in Suriname. Roads and driving conditions are poor. Police only sporadically enforce local traffic laws and, as a result, local drivers drive recklessly. Stop signs and traffic signals are often treated as suggestions only. Be very cognizant of mopeds, scooters and motorcycles especially when making turns. They are very common and always have the right of way.

If you are involved in an accident, you are expected to stay at the scene until the police arrive to take a report. This wait can often stretch into hours, and it is not uncommon for roads to be completely blocked by a minor accident while waiting for the police to arrive.

Driving while talking on a cell phone is illegal and is one of the few traffic offenses that is regularly enforced.

#### POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Although Suriname has ongoing border disputes with its neighbors, Guyana and French Guiana, Suriname is not currently engaged in any armed hostilities with any country. Post does not anticipate violence resulting from existing territorial or political controversies in the near future.

On November 30, 2007, former President and military strongman Desi Bouterse and 24 co-defendants went on trial for the December 8, 1982 murders of 15 members of the political opposition. The trial convened at the special court facility at the Naval base in Boxel, approximately 15 miles south of Paramaribo. While the trial is still ongoing, widespread fears that this might result in political violence have, so far, been unfounded.

With a few minor exceptions there have been no incidents of political violence since the early 1980s.

#### POST SPECIFIC CONCERNS

In May 2006, Suriname experienced severe flooding in the interior of the country. The crisis stretched the Government of Suriname's resources beyond capacity and in the ensuing state of emergency, the GOS relied heavily on foreign and international assistance. The GOS would likely approach the

UNDP, and the U.S. and Dutch embassies for guidance and assistance should any major emergencies take place in Paramaribo.

Attacks on affluent families and business owners continued to increase in 2008 as they have in recent years. According to statistics provided by the Surinamese Police, Homicides were up 63 percent and Aggravated Robberies were up 45 percent from 2007.

There were several incidents of prominent business owners being targeted for robbery. In each case, small teams of bandits conducted surveillance, formulated plans, and executed successful crimes. Methods of attack ranged from car jacking to ambushes outside businesses to home invasions.

The growing number and sophistication of illegal weapons and ammunition present in Suriname, especially in Paramaribo, threatens the public safety.

Police fear neighborhood vigilante groups will be created to confront the local gangs. The availability of illegal, and in most cases untraceable, weapons will only promote an escalation in violence should this type of scenario happen.

Criminals in Suriname are increasingly willing to resort to violence while committing all types of crimes. Firearms are the weapons of choice for criminals and there seems to be no inhibition to using them if challenged.

If confronted by an armed criminal, do not argue or attempt to confront him/her in any way. Quickly relinquish what you are asked to surrender.

Most foreigners are very visible in public and should take precautions when visiting downtown areas. Visitors should avoid wearing expensive jewelry, displaying large sums of cash in public, or otherwise appearing ostentatious. Visitors are advised to make every attempt to change currency at hotels, local banks, or official cambios. Visitors are strongly discouraged from exchanging currency on the street, as this is both dangerous and illegal.

There have been reports of criminal incidents in the vicinities of the major hotels used by tourists and US Government employees traveling on official orders. Walking alone outside at night, even in the immediate vicinity of these hotels, is not recommended.

Most violent crimes against foreigners have been confined to the capital. However, there have been a few incidents of violent crimes committed in other parts of the country as well.

#### POLICE RESPONSE

Local police in Suriname have resource and manpower limitations that inhibit their ability to deter or respond to criminal activity. Police patrols are rare or nonexistent. There is an emergency telephone number; "115" for police, fire, or rescue. The fire department provides a timely response, while a police response, especially during the night, is a rarity for all but the most serious crimes. The Police response to alarms or emergency calls is often too slow (15 minutes or longer). It is not unusual for the victim of a crime to transport the police from the police station back to the crime scene.

#### MEDICAL EMERGENCIES

Emergency medical services can be contacted by calling either "115" or 448-888. Ambulances will not be dispatched unless directed to do so by the police or a physician. Persons calling the emergency telephone number for immediate medical service are usually instructed by the police to take the injured party by taxi to the nearest medical facility rather than wait for an ambulance.

The Academic Hospital is the one commonly used for responding to medical emergencies and trauma such as traffic accidents. The hospital is located less than one mile from the American Embassy at the intersection of Dr. Sophie Redmondstraat Prof. Kernkampweg and has adequately trained staff and equipment to stabilize those in need of attention, before medical evacuation can be arranged. Travelers should be aware that medical standards are far below what one would expect in the United States.

#### TRAVEL PRECAUTIONS

All Americans are reminded to be aware of their surroundings at all times. Local and international news broadcasts should be monitored for events that may impact on the local security situation. Americans who become victims of crime while in Suriname are advised to contact American Citizen Services at the Consular Section of the American Embassy at 011-597-472-900 extension 2235, or the Embassy after hours Duty Officer at 011-597-0-880-8032.

The use of public transportation, such as mini buses, by visitors unfamiliar with the country is highly discouraged. The use of reputable taxis however is generally acceptable. Those services offered through the major hotels and tourist agencies are usually safer, more reliable and inexpensive. Travel to the interior of the country requires caution; therefore, travelers wishing to visit the interior are advised to make use of well-established tour companies for safer experiences. There have been reports of tourists and foreigners being robbed while traveling in the countryside, and occasional reports of bandits on rural roads.

#### FURTHER INFORMATION

American Citizen Services can be contacted at

011-597-472-900, extension 2236 or 2237. The Embassy Duty Officer can be reached at 011-597-0-880-8302

#### OSAC COUNTRY COUNCIL

There is no Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) in Suriname. The Embassy maintains contact with the business community through its Economic Office and through the Surinamese Chapter of the American Chamber of Commerce. The number of the Embassy is 011-597-472-900. The RSO, Douglas C. Marvin, is available to provide security information and briefings to any American company. RSO Marvin can be contacted via email at [marvindc@state.gov](mailto:marvindc@state.gov) or through the Embassy at extension x2262.

SCHREIBER HUGHES